

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Sharon Wise, and I am from Hamden, CT. I am also a social worker doing intensive case management at Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) in New Haven.

I stand in support of S.B. 284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults. In my work with the immigrant community, I see first hand how important it is for individuals of all ages to be able to have health insurance and obtain services from the healthcare system. Expanding access for Husky Health Insurance up to the age of 18 will benefit so many more young people who need healthcare and are not able to obtain it under the present system. Therefore, the ultimate goal would be to expand access to immigrants of all ages, including parents and adults. At the current time, parents and adults who are not eligible for Husky Health Insurance have enormous challenges obtaining medical care and accessing the healthcare system. They are sometimes seen in the emergency departments of hospitals, which is a less than ideal protocol when the medical issues are often not emergencies at all, but sometimes a variety of medical challenges, emerging illnesses or sudden onset of diseases. If these young adults, parents and older adults had access to Husky, they would be able to become connected with community healthcare centers, medical clinics and primary healthcare providers, thus freeing up the hospital emergency departments and their staff to focus on issues of more urgency, including life threatening issues that they see everyday.

It is imperative that the state of Connecticut make a plan to expand access to all of its citizens to the Husky Health Insurance system in order to benefit not only individuals, but large portions of urban and ethnic communities that are now being underserved in the overall healthcare system. This is extremely important at this point in time during a global pandemic and the increasing availability of Covid vaccines and testing. For communities that include undocumented folks, there is a tremendous amount of mistrust of governmental systems, including the healthcare system. If access to Husky were expanded and people encouraged to connect with medical professionals for all members of their families, important relationships could begin between medical professionals (physicians, nurses and others) and through these relationships conversations can happen to promote listening along with educating the most vulnerable members of our population on the efficacy and importance of vaccines, from the Covid vaccine to flu vaccines to other important preventative measures to control and prevent the spread of diseases.

I ask the committee to support and pass the important legislation of S.B. 284. Going forward, I hope that the committee can work toward expanding access to all immigrants regardless of age. Thank you for your time.

Sharon Wise
Hamden, Connecticut